

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OES-03 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PM-03

DODE-00 L-03 SS-15 SP-02 NSC-05 EUR-12 AID-05 EB-07

COME-00 TRSE-00 AGR-05 OMB-01 IGA-01 /076 W

----- 044045

P 251410Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7380

NASA HEADQUARTERS WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1123

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: NASA, PFOR, US, MA

SUBJECT: CALL ON PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA BY CHARGE

REF: A. TANANARIVE 0541; B. TANANARIVE 0775

SUMMARY: CHARGE CALLED ON PRESIDENT OF SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL DIDIER RATSIRAKA JUNE 25. BASIC SUBJECT WAS NASA TRACKING STATION. RATSIRAKA REVIVED BACK RENT ISSUE WHICH HE SAID HE SEES AS DEBT OWED TO MALAGASY GOVERNMENT. HE SAID IF DEBT NOT PAID THERE COULD BE NO AGREEMENT ON CONTINUATION OF STATION. IN SCARCELY VEILED THREAT HE SAID HE EXPECTED REPLY BEFORE APOLLO-SOYUZ MISSION JULY 15. END SUMMARY.

1. CHARGE CALLED UPON PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA JUNE 25 IN RESPONSE TO REQUEST JUNE 24 BY PROTOCOL OFFICE OF PRESIDENCY WHO SAID THEY WERE ARRANGING INDIVIDUAL APPOINTMENTS FOR ALL CHIEFS OF MISSION. CHARGE MET WITH PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA IN HIS OFFICE ALONE. CHARGE USED OCCASION TO DELIVER PRESIDENT FORD'S CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE FOR MALAGASY INDEPENDENCE DAY JUNE 26. RATSIRAKA EXPRESSED HIS THANKS FOR MESSAGE AND SAID HE HOPED THAT THE GOOD RELATIONS REFERRED TO IN PRESIDENT FORD'S MESSAGE WOULD CONTINUE BETWEEN US. RATSIRAKA SAID THAT HE HAD HOPED TO DISCUSS U.S. - MALAGASY RELATIONS WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER WHILE HE WAS AT UNGA LAST YEAR, BUT THIS DID NOT CONFIDENTIAL

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WORK OUT. RATSIRAKA THEN TURNED TO DISCUSSION OF NASA STATION.

2. PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA REFERRED BACK TO HIS VISIT TO U.S. IN 1973 WHEN HE MET "DIRECTOR GENERAL" OF NASA AND DISCUSSED

PROBLEM OF BACKRENT OWED TO MALAGASY GOVERNMENT BY NASA. HE SAID HE RECEIVED VERBAL ASSURANCE THAT THIS DEMAND WOULD BE MET FROM SENIOR NASA OFFICIAL (UNNAMED). PRICE HE DEMANDED IS AS IN REFTTEL - 200 MILLION FMG OR ABOUT \$1 MILLION PER YEAR FOR TOTAL OF \$10 MILLION. WHEN CHARGE STATED U.S. POSITION THAT RENT IS PAYABLE ONLY FROM EXPIRATION OF LAST ACCORD, I.E. 1973, THAT RENT NOT PART OF PREVIOUS AGREEMENTS, AND \$100,000 FOR PAST TWO YEARS PREVIOUSLY AGREED IN PRINCIPLE WITH GOMR, RATSIRAKA BRUSHED THIS ASIDE, SAYING HE WAS FACED WITH POLITICAL PROBLEM CONCERNING NASA STATION. HE SAID HE HAD TOLD PEOPLE HERE THAT BASED ON HIS CONVERSATIONS IN U.S. HE WOULD EXTRACT "GOOD PRICE" FOR NASA STATION. HE SAID HE HAD TO DELIVER, AND WAS UNDER ATTACK FROM AKFM (PRO-SOVIET POLITPVAL PARTY). HE SAID THAT RENT OFFERED WAS TOO LITTLE, "ENOUGH FOR THE GROUND PERHAPS," BUT DID NOT COVER "STRATEGIC VALUE" OF STATION. CONVERSATION THEN SHIFTED BRIEFLY TO INDIAN OCEAN ISSUES (REPORTED SEPTTEL). CHARGE DENIED THAT NASA STATION HAD STRATEGIC OR MILITARY FUNCTIONS NOTING THAT PREPONDERANCE OF EMPLOYEES WERE MALAGASY. RATSIRAKA BACKED DOWN SOMEWHAT SAYING THAT STATION "COULD TRACK MILITARY SATELLITES" AND U.S. SHOULD PAY FOR POTENTIAL, WHATEVER PRESENT U.S. POLICY WAS. "HE SAID, IN ADDITION, THAT HE WAS UNDER PRESSURE FROM SOVIETS TO PERMIT THEM TO BUILD TRACKING STATION.

3. CHARGE BEGAN TO ENUMERATE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF STATION FOR MADAGASCAR, BUT RATSIRAKA BRUSHED THESE ASIDE STATING THAT POLITICAL OPPOSITION HE FACED WOULD BE UNIMPRESSED BY THESE ARGUMENTS. CHARGE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT NASA WAS NOT AN AID ORGANIZATION; BUT THAT U.S. AID FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES HAD BEEN GIVEN TO MADAGASCAR IN PAST AND POSSIBILITIES EXISTED FOR FUTURE. POSSIBILITIES MENTIONED WERE FUTURE A.I.D. AGRICULTURAL LOAN, EXPORT-IMPORT FINANCING FOR AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT WHICH HAD BEEN RAISED EARLIER INFORMALLY BY GOMR, PL 480 TITLE I ASSISTANCE, DESPITE GOMR REJECTION OF EARLIER OFFER, AND ASSISTANCE WITH PRIVATE INVESTMENT SUCH AS PROPOSED FERTILIZER PLANT, IF LATTER WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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POSSIBLE WITHIN NEW GOMR ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK. CHARGE EMPHASIZED THAT THESE WERE POSSIBILITIES, NOT COMMITMENTS BUT THAT EMBASSY SAW NOTHING IN RATSIRAKA'S ECONOMIC POLICY STATEMENTS SO FAR THAT WOULD PRECLUDE CONTINUED U.S. - MALAGASY ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN ALL THESE AREAS. RATSIRAKA LISTENED ATTENTIVELY BUT MADE NO COMMENT.

4. RATSIRAKA CONCLUDED STATING, "IN MY EYES NASA HAS A DEBT TO MADAGASCAR, AND IF THE DEBT IS NOT PAID THERE CAN NOT BE ANY AGREEMENT ON THE CONTINUATION OF THE STATION." HE SAID FURTHER, "IF NASA CANNOT PAY THIS MONEY, I ADDRESS MYSELF TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE U.S. LET THEM GET THE MONEY OUT OF THE TREASURY AND GIVE IT TO NASA." HE ANSWERED CHARGE'S

EXPLANATION OF DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED, CONGRESSIONAL APPROPRIATIONS, BUDGET PROBLEMS, AND LIKELIHOOD THAT NASA WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO PAY SUCH A SUM, BY SIMPLY SAYING HE EXPECTED THAT PROBLEM COULD BE RESOLVED BEFORE APOLLO-SOYUZ MISSION JULY 15.

5. EMBASSY COMMENT:

THE "PRESSURES" ON RATSIRAKA NOTWITHSTANDING EMBASSY BELIEVES IT NOT LIKELY HE WILL PULL PLUG ON NASA BEFORE JULY 15 AND BELIVES HE DOES NOT REALLY WANT TO SEE NASA STATION LEAVE. HOWEVER, IF NOT PROBABLE IT IS POSSIBLE (SEE REFTEL B). EMBASSY'S DETAILED COMMENTS FOLLOW IN SEPTTEL TOGETHER WITH DRAFT RESPONSE TO RATSIRAKA'S DEMANDS.
ELFERS

CONFIDENTIAL

<< END OF DOCUMENT >>

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 26 AUG 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NEGOTIATIONS, TRACKING STATIONS, LEASES, GOVERNMENT DEBTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 JUN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TANANA01123
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D750220-0446
From: TANANARIVE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750699/baaaadzn.tel
Line Count: 126
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 AUG 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <12 DEC 2003 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: n/a
TAGS: PFOR, US, MA, NASA
To: STATE
NASA HEADQUARTERS
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006